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Gathering of the Greats— And Hopes of Tomorrow

The Mighty Meet 370 Young Achievers
At the Olympus of Excellence

By Judy Bachrach

EXCERPT:

OWENSBORO, Ky.—

It is called The American Academy of Achievement; their 17th annual Salute to Excellence described as "A Gathering of the Greats." Debby Boone with her newly permed hair; Howard Jarvis, ornery papa of Proposition 13; jockey Steve Cauthen, the new object of mini-lust among schoolgirls; editorial cartoonist Tony Auth; CIA Director Stansfield Turner; FBI Director William Webster; Col. Harland Sanders at 87; Armand Hammer, Occidental Petroleum chieftain; a 12-year-old genius enrolled in pre-law and pre-med at the University of Southern California; German anti-terrorist Col. Ulrich Wegener; Edward Asner, who came originally because Cloris Leachman told him to; Olivia de Havilland who arrived because Judge John Sirica asked her to; John Sirica who was there because Leon Jaworski once asked him to come; Helen Hayes, because "Brian Reynolds is a very persuasive man, as you know."

Stansfield Turner, one of the gods of achievement this year, is here because Judge John Sirica, one of the gods of achievement last year, asked him to come. The CIA director, seated before his beef-and-potato dinner, flashes his best Navy-recruiting smile at the three California young achievers across from him, allowing it to settle finally on a high-school graduate whose name-tag reads "Cassandra Shafer, Student Leader of the Year." "They call you Cassie or Cassandra?" asks the CIA director. "Cassandra," the girl replies archly, "they call you Stansfield or Stan?" "Stan," replies the CIA director, clearly taken aback.

"Except his mother," offers Turner's wife, "his mother calls him Stansfield."

Judge Frank Johnson, another of this year's honorees, drops his fork to ask the girl if she realizes she is talking to the CIA director.

"OH MY GOSH," squeals the stricken Cassandra, appalled at her faux pas. Her tone turns conciliatory. "I always liked the CIA. Ever since I read 'Mrs. Pollifax, the Spy'."



The talk gradually turns to other things: to the concept of racial equality—Turner asks the students if they think it exists in the United States; to Judge Johnson, who quotes the Rev. Jesse Jackson: "Jackson said, 'From now on, it's up to you.' I certainly agree." And finally—to the problems in black education:

"It sort of feeds on itself," says Turner. "They don't have a lot of educated people, they don't have an esteem for education, they don't have a background for it."

Cassandra's eyes search the huge ballroom. "There certainly are very few blacks around the room," she says.

Earlier in the conversation, Turner offers the young achievers a little explanation of how the CIA works: "In addition to spying, we have to take the products of spying and understand it."

"I didn't think the head of the CIA would go around saying the word 'spy,'" marvels a young man named Brad. "It kind of has a bad connotation about it."

"I want to be a spy," says Cassandra, smiling.

"Cassandra," says the grateful Turner, "You apply to us when you graduate."

"Cassandra," says Judge Johnson, "You just wiped yourself out with that 'Stan' business."